

Ultimate holiday gift guide: 34 inspirations

western living

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getaway guide

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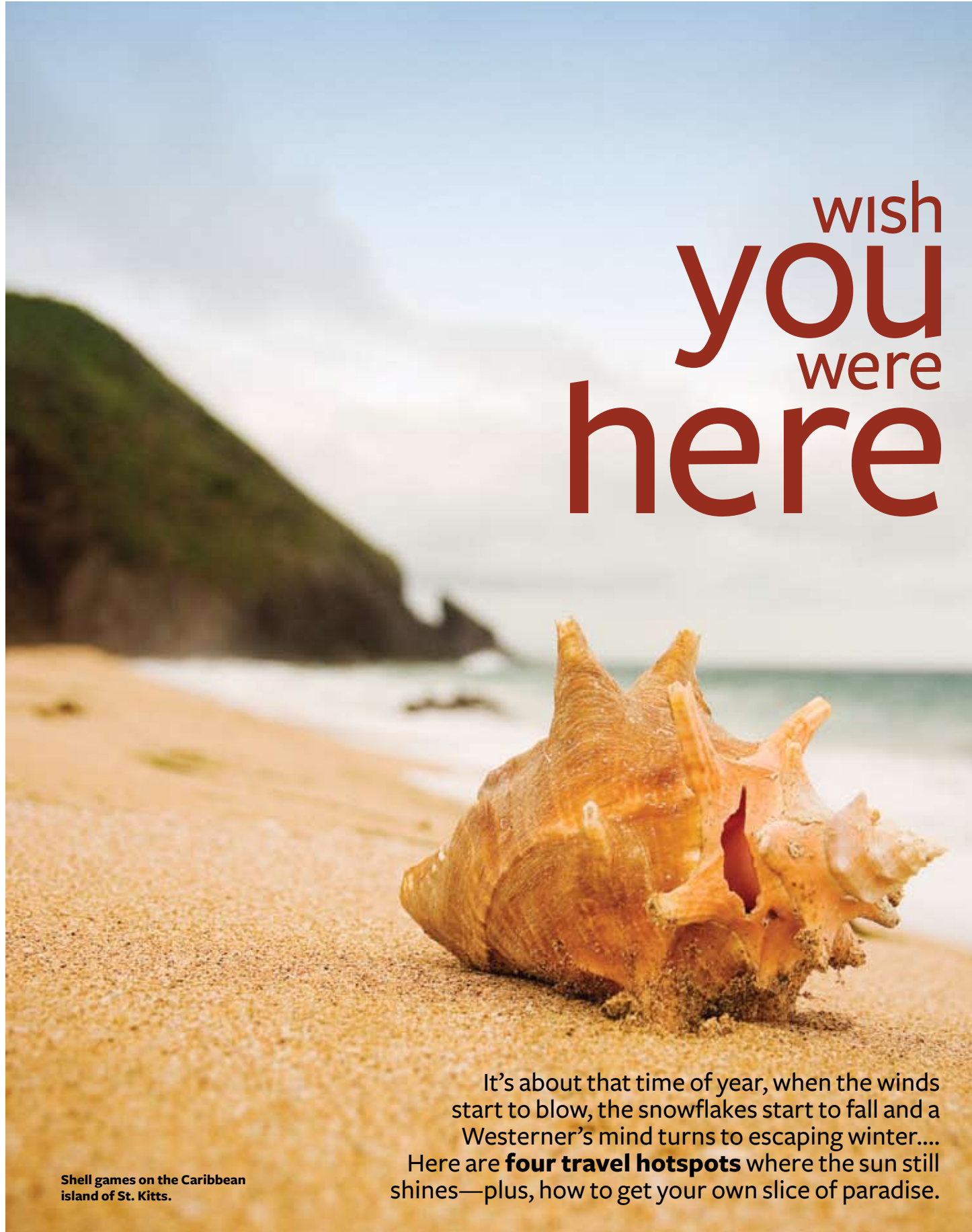
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The unspoiled Caribbean island of St. Kitts.



wish
you
were
here

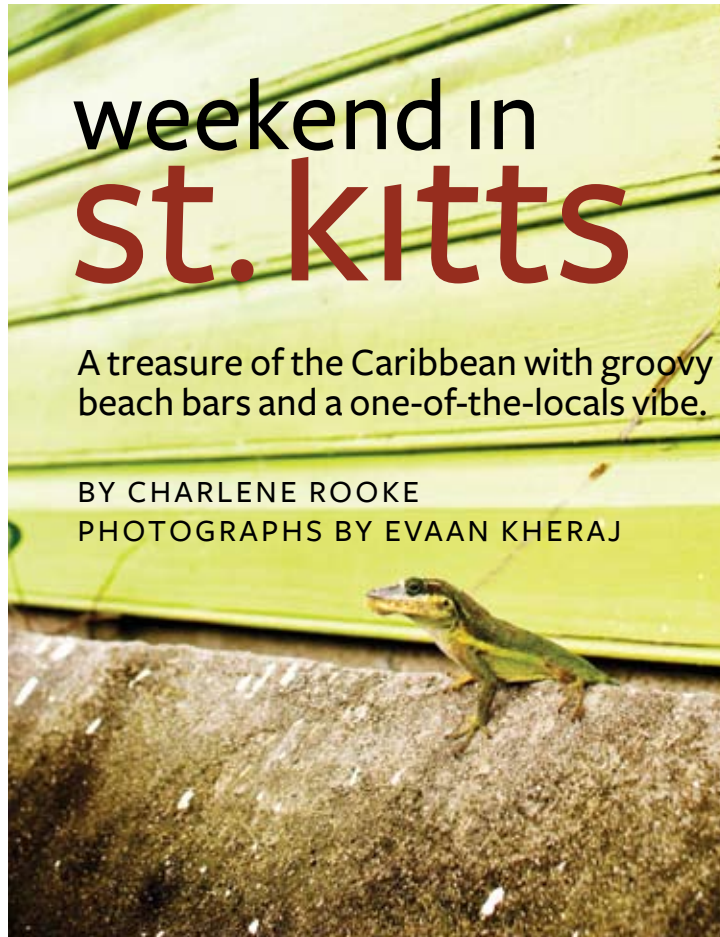
Shell games on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts.

It's about that time of year, when the winds start to blow, the snowflakes start to fall and a Westerner's mind turns to escaping winter.... Here are **four travel hotspots** where the sun still shines—plus, how to get your own slice of paradise.

weekend in st. kitts

A treasure of the Caribbean with groovy beach bars and a one-of-the-locals vibe.

BY CHARLENE ROOKE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVAAN KHERAJ



When I headed to St. Kitts, the plan wasn't naked frolicking in the Caribbean. But that's how it's now looking, as the initial euphoria of the Dash 8's descent into the island's quaint, open-air pavilion-style airport disappears as fast as my welcome cocktail: my luggage has been waylaid in the quick Miami connection.

Forty-five minutes and a hot shower later, it doesn't really matter. I'm parked on a rough-hewn wooden bench, my travel-weary jeans rolled to the knees and my peasant blouse reinvented as off-the-shoulder evening wear. My friends and I had strolled down the road to Mr. X's Shiggidy Shack, one of the beach bars that are the sum of nightlife on the island. Chilling with an icy bucket of Carib beers, reggae floating over the sand and buttery grilled lobsters coming off the grill, life seems good tonight.

You feel like a bit of a jet-setter here, even suitcase-less and knowing you'll never own one of the mansions in Frigate Bay. Its low-storey, low-key vibe, its sapphire waters and emerald lushness and blingingly bright sand give St. Kitts the feel of an undiscovered jewel. My biggest problem is finding cheap tank tops and flip-flops: so ubiquitous on other islands, tacky souvenir stands are blessedly few and far between here.

I end up emblazoned with the fine logo of the Marriott St. Kitts the next morning, though a few clouds are an excuse to avoid nude sunbathing anyway. We end up on an island tour that's a capsule lesson in colo-

onial history. I lag behind the others on the 800-foot rise up to Brimstone Hill Fortress and wander on my own self-guided tour of its nooks and crannies, its stones cleaved from volcanic rock, cemented with limestone mortar, hand-built by African slaves and designed by British military engineers. (It's now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.) On a clear day, from here you can see sister island Nevis—no longer quite as pristine or undiscovered since Four Seasons and other luxe resorts have set up camp.

Choosing from St. Kitts's historic plantations (among them heritage sites, private homes and even a working sugar plantation), we visit Rawlins Plantation Inn on the north shore for its quaint dining porch and West Indian lunch buffet. We finish our conch chowder, fried plantain and spicy fish just as the sun peeks out, and drink our custom-blended spice teas down at pool level, our feet dangling in the cool water.

The appearance of my luggage back at the hotel calls for both a celebratory sip of local Brinley Gold rum at the bar then a night out on the town. We hop in a cab for dinner at the tony Marshall's restaurant,

where crab cakes and surf and turf hit the spot. The only dark moment in our trip comes a couple of hours after dinner, when one friend is unexpectedly rushed to the island's only hospital suffering an apparent allergic reaction to something she's eaten. Even that incident turns out happily: she's immediately seen and treated by a doctor then sent back to the hotel to sleep. She never gets a hospital bill. "Next time I need an emergency room I'm going to fly to St. Kitts," she jokes the next day. "It would be cheaper and faster!"

Our last night demands a return to Shiggidy Shack for its notorious karaoke night. But the real entertainment comes from an adorable little Kittitian boy who plays peek-a-boo and dances for us until his dad hauls him away (but not before we buy several of his carved wooden fish key chains). Yet the next day, when we run into the boy over lunch at another beach bar, he doesn't remember us at all. We leave St. Kitts with this single pang of regret: how sweet it would be to be remembered, just as fondly as we'll remember this place.

For travel information, see SOURCES.

SOURCES

WEEKEND IN ST. KITTS

Page 40 For vacation planning and suggested activities visit stkittstourism.kn. The **St. Kitts Marriott** is a full-service resort with a casino, spa and three pools (one family, two “quiet”). **858 Frigate Bay Rd., 869-466-1200, marriott.com.**

At the island’s bars, eateries and fine-dining rooms sample juicy fresh seafood and Kittitian specialties (from goat to conch to roti) with an icy cold Carib beer. **Shiggidy Shack, Frigate Bay (near the Timothy Beach Hotel); Turtle Beach Bar, Turtle Point, 869-469-9086; Rawlins Plantation Inn, Frigate Bay, 869-466-8245, rawlinsplantation.com; Marshall’s at Horizon Villa, Frigate Bay, 869-465-6221, marshalls-stkitts.com.**

St. Kitts has a rich history evident in the many monuments, churches, historic ruins and buildings you’ll see on your rambles. Architecture and history buffs shouldn’t miss the UNESCO-protected Brimstone Hill Fortress.

Get a piece of paradise Canadian company Newfound Property International has carved out a premium swath of Frigate Bay, within walking distance of the Royal St. Kitts Golf Course, for **Ocean’s Edge**. Villa, cottage and apartment prices start at \$315,000, and with a major luxury resort chain rumored to be eyeing a parcel of land down the road, they are bound to escalate. For a taste of the integrity this developer is known for, have a look at their Three Sisters Mountain Village in Canmore or Humber Valley Resort in west Newfoundland. newfoundproperty.com, oceansedgestkitts.com.

WEEKEND IN MAUI

Page 42 For trip, wedding and group travel planning information, check out visitmaui.com.

Both the Hotel Hana-Maui and Napili Kai Beach Resort offer a laid-back vibe. **Hotel Hana-Maui, 800-321-4262, hotelhanamaui.com; Napili Kai Beach Resort, 808-669-6271, napilikai.com.**

The Hawaiian art of massage known as Lomi Lomi uses long, rhythmic strokes as the therapist stretches and relaxes knotty muscles. Ask for Finn at the Hotel Hana-Maui’s Honua spa—he’s got just enough new age-ness to have you floating off the table. **800-321-4262, hotelhanamaui.com.**

The **Pacific Whale Foundation** is a non-profit organization with research facilities in Ecuador and Australia dedicated to whale preservation—and they run snorkel tours on Maui! **Lahaina Ocean Store, 612 Front St., 808-667-7447, pacificwhale.org.**

As much as a lu’au screams tourist trap, if you’re a fan of performance dancing it’s worth checking out a well-run event. The **Old Lahaina Lu’au** is run by friendly staff, the dancers are top-notch, and the food is decent too: they roast a pig in an authentic underground oven for the day. Plus, open bar! **800-248-5828, oldlahainaluau.com.**

Though it’s challenging to find local joints on the more-developed west coast of Maui, Hana’s small-town vibe means that you’re in for a treat. Bypass the tour-bus heavy Hana Ranch restaurant for **Braddah Hutt’s**, just a minute further up the main road. From his front yard he grills up mahi mahi, steak, chicken and ribs—and for \$10, he loads you



Ocean’s Edge: a piece of paradise on St. Kitts.



Snorkelling with Pacific Whale Foundation.

up with enough pasta salad, rice and vegetables to feed two.

Get a piece of paradise The exclusive 700-unit **Honua Kai** condo-hotel resort occupies one of the last stretches of prime beachfront on Maui’s fashionable Ka’anapali Beach on the west coast, and the third and final release of one-, two- and three-bedroom units (priced from \$695,000 to \$5 million plus) generated more than \$100 million in sales on the offer day. Canadian company Intrawest owes at least some of the success of the development to Western Canadians: one-fifth of Honua Kai buyers hail from Alberta alone. **866-678-1310, honuakai.com, intrawest.com.** —*Rhona MacInnes*